

## DARCHAI NOAM

### Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayera, October 2013

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How can the Parashah help us grow this week?

#### Put in the extra effort!

In this week's parashah of Vayera, Avraham is recovering from his brit milah. However, he still yearns to receive visitors so that he can welcome them to his home. Hashem sends three angels to Avraham in the guise of men to enable him to fulfil the mitzva of hachnasat orchim (being hospitable to visitors). Avraham receives his guests with enthusiasm, running here and rushing there to make sure that his guests feel welcome.

The Gemara (Baba Metzia 86b) teaches that for every action that Avraham directly did for his guests, Bnei Yisrael received a corresponding reward while they were wandering in the desert. However, for all the indirect actions that Avraham carried out for the guests through a messenger, Avraham's descendants merited a reward that was only indirectly provided by Hashem. For example:

- Avraham personally ran to get cattle for his guests to eat, so Hashem Himself provided Bnei Yisrael with quail to eat in the desert.
- Avraham personally brought his guests butter and milk, so Hashem Himself provided the manna from heaven.
- Avraham did not fetch water directly for his guests, but rather he asked his servant to fetch some water. Therefore Hashem only provided Bnei Yisrael with water in the desert through the hand of Moshe (when he hit the rock).

Why does the Gemara make this distinction, thus implying that the indirect chessed of Avraham was inferior to his direct actions?

This incident demonstrates the following important principle: '*lefum tzaara agra*' - the reward is in proportion to the effort' (Pirkei Avot 5:26). When Avraham invested extra effort and carried out an action by himself, his reward was greater. When Avraham asked his servant to carry out an act of chessed, the reward received by his descendants was also somewhat diluted.

It is important to note that this is by no means a criticism of Avraham Avinu. He was almost 100 years old and he was recovering from a very painful operation. Yet he still exerted himself and ran to cater for his visitors. Avraham certainly did whatever he could physically do in the circumstances. However, this incident highlights the importance of putting in a bit of extra effort, particularly when performing acts of kindness.

Perhaps there is another point that we can extract from the Gemara's distinction that is relevant for us. When we perform acts of kindness, we may feel justifiably proud of ourselves. However, no matter how great is the act of kindness, there is always room for improvement. There is always something extra that we could do, another detail that would

make the recipient of the kind act feel even more special. For example, if someone knocks on your door and asks for tzedaka, don't just give them money, ask them to come inside and rest their legs and offer them some refreshments. If someone asks you for a lift, don't just give them a ride, also give them a genuine smile and warm wishes for a good day.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky's wife, Rebbetzin Kanievsky, always made sure to bring each of her guests their own portion of food on a plate, rather than letting them serve themselves. She was concerned that some of her guests might limit their portions due to feeling embarrassed to eat in front of her illustrious husband. She also liked to give each guest exactly what they liked. She took the effort to remember which person liked extra kugel, which person didn't like meat and which person preferred extra potatoes.<sup>1</sup>

Let's try something this week:

1. The next time that we have an opportunity to perform an act of kindness, stop and think how we can enhance and personalise the act. With a bit of extra effort we can bring our kindness up to a whole new level.
2. While performing acts of kindness, try to catch any thoughts of gaiva (pride) that might creep into our minds. Replace these with thoughts of how to enhance the mitzva. In this way we will be re-channelling any negative energy towards boosting the kind act itself.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Allon Ledder

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Story of Rebbetzin Kanievsky', Artscroll p87.

## **About Darchai Noam**

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah relating to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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